

# **EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

**East Providence School Committee**

**East Providence City Hall, 145 Taunton Avenue**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02914**

**January 29, 2013**

## **Open Session**

**Mr. Monteiro, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:15 PM.**

**Members present: Elizabeth Clupny, Timothy Conley, Anthony Ferreira, Richard Pimental, Joel Monteiro. Also present: Dr. John DeGoes, Interim Superintendent and Andrew Thomas, Esq. Motion by Mr. Pimental to convene in Executive Session for purposes of discussing: Personnel - R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (1), Collective Bargaining R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (2), Litigation/Pending Litigation -R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a)(2, seconded by Mr. Ferreira. Vote 5-0.**

**Motion by Mr. Ferreira to return to public session at 7:00PM, seconded by Mr. Pimental. Vote 5-0.**

**Motion by Mrs. Clupny to seal the minutes of the executive session, seconded by Mr. Pimental.**

**Vote 5-0.**

**Report Executive Session Votes – None**

**Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag & Moment of Silence observed**

**Proposal to Close Oldham Elementary School**

**Interim Superintendent, John V. DeGoes, explained that he**

recommended that the School Committee approve the closing of Oldham School at a meeting on January 10, 2013; a public hearing was held last week at Riverside Middle School at which time parents expressed concerns about the possibility of sending Oldham students to Waddington School. After further study and review of the recommendations, Dr. DeGoes now recommended transferring Oldham students and faculty to the Meadowcrest School building; we would be changing the address of Oldham to Meadowcrest, which would allow Oldham to remain a Title I school and students would continue to benefit with everyone moving to Meadowcrest. The Program at Meadowcrest, which is highly successful in meeting the needs of preschool children, would be moved in its entirety to Waddington (instead of sending 150 we would be sending 75 students - only half at a single time; they could occupy a wing at Waddington School by making accommodations between now and the start of school in September. The \$2.1 million which needs to be spent on Oldham could be used to address other needs; \$70,000 in utilities could be saved along with \$70-90,000 for a new Principal at Meadowcrest which would no longer be necessary . For those reasons Dr. DeGoes recommended closing Oldham School and sending the entire program to the Meadowcrest building; the Meadowcrest program would be moved to Waddington School.

#### **School Committee Comments**

Mr. Ferreira stated that the State Budget Commission has already made the decision to close Oldham School. Dr. DeGoes stated that he does not believe the state will allow us to fund any rehab work at

Oldham with the bond money. Mr. Conley asked if we can accommodate the needs of gym and lunch at the Meadowcrest site.

Dr. DeGoes stated that the Meadowcrest building can handle it; there is no gym or cafeteria there now but it was built to serve as an elementary school and has a large double room which can be used for a cafeteria and gym; the parking is more than adequate; playground fenced for recess area. Mr. Conley's concern was that the city is not in the financial condition to create/fund a gym at the school and we should replicate Oldham at Meadowcrest.

Mr. Conley questioned the vote on the \$15 million bond for specific projects; the previous administration heard questions about breach of fiduciary responsibility; this is representative of administrative dysfunction; this was not clear to voters and it needs to be corrected so it cannot happen again in the future.

Mr. Monteiro stated this is a lesson to all to stay involved; keep ears open; do not take anything for granted; elected officials are to make decisions; as a resident, suffering because it was left to others; he expects the School Committee would be held accountable. He thanked Dr. DeGoes for taking on this task; at last week's meeting, he made recommendations based on the information he had; as Interim Superintendent, he could have stayed with his original recommendation, but he listened to the concerns. Mr. Monteiro received a call on Friday night regarding the Meadowcrest idea and he thanked the Superintendent for taking time to come up with another solution, which is commendable. Parents and residents are speaking out and holding everyone accountable.

## **Public Comment**

**Fred Rybka thanked Dr. DeGoes for looking at another alternative; he does not agree with it, but happy about keeping Title I money intact; he has questions about how much it will cost to complete repairs at Meadowcrest and what will happen next year with Meadowcrest if the Budget Commission recommends closing another school.**

**Ed Catelli, Facilities Director, stated that the \$250,000 budget is designated for fire safety , alarms, and doors to conform to laws and regulations.**

**Mr. Rybka said he does not want schools to close at all and does not like the idea of sending preschool kids to Waddington. If money is the issue, why not close Meadowcrest and consider putting that rehab money into Oldham to patch roof, then do the roof over with another bond; are we stuck with final decision. He was concerned with how we arrived at \$2 million without going through a bid process; how can we close a school without getting exact information first; he attended Budget Commission meetings; cannot grasp how this works; raises for city employees being talked about; we should fight to keep the school open; what is the state mandating – does anyone know?**

**Dr. DeGoes stated that when he found out in September that the Budget Commission wanted a school closed for the 2013-14 school year, he wanted to give the School Committee some options, but when looking at numbers, there were not a lot of options—it had to be Oldham and he started the process to make that happen; \$2 million would be needed for Oldham; Meadowcrest would not make**

up for money not in the budget.

Mr. Monteiro stated that \$2 million at the High School was just a band aid; shame on us for ten years of letting it happen; we have to look at choices of options; do what we can control; look at what our options are and clarify numbers. Meadowcrest parents initially voiced their skepticism but then turned to how can we make it work; we need to see more of that; the meeting at Meadowcrest went well and we now have a positive attitude toward that option.

Mr. Ferreira thought the Meadowcrest meeting was very informative; School Committee needs to have information on numbers and floor plans in order to make an honest decision; need to know if the roof falls under mandates this year for building inspector approval or just alarms and doors; could Oldham open without fixing the roof.

Mr. Catelli stated that he has high regard for work done by the architects and explained the process: the Building Inspector needs drawings in hand; the architects came up with preliminary numbers, we needed to secure bond money before going out to bid; we went through all the buildings and have dollar figures for roofs, doors, life safety with justification for each item; a building committee decided where to spend the money; then we went through the RIDE approval process. Every year, Mr. Catelli accompanies the Building Inspector and Fire Inspector on visits to every school; the roof at Oldham is probably ten years past its time; if we do not spend money to repair it, students will probably not be allowed to enter the building.

Mr. Ferreira said he was in another school with buckets under roof leaks; he wants to be able assure parents; why close a school for a

roof; he will push for a list in short time so not last minute; we owe it to the kids to stay on it.

Mr. Catelli reported that a new construction committee has started and will meet one or two times per month to go over blueprints and see where the money will be spent; the School Committee can report on it.

Mr. Conley commended Dr. DeGoes for developing a much better plan; previous administration chose to use the funds designated for Oldham (\$2.1) for other projects; he felt the department was dysfunctional.

Dr. DeGoes concurs 100% ; no idea about the bond; people led astray; \$2.1 designated to Oldham; money had to be spent at the high school; in looking at allocation of \$7 million, none was allocated to Oldham; he had no choice at this point but to close the building.

Mr. Conley stated this was never communicated to voters and this is no way to run a School Department.

Mrs. Conley spoke about the fact that this is a huge concern; she voted for the bond, the money not allocated; no eye brows raised; no one taking responsibility; Oldham now suffering the brunt; her concern is for Oldham – will the new location be replicated with Smart Boards, same teachers, Principal; has this plan been communicated to principals; Waddington operating without textbooks – when will money be spent there; what's going on inside the school is important.

Dr. DeGoes said the citizens of the city bear a large part of the responsibility for this, money not being allocated in budgets; small

amount not nearly enough; this has been going on for lot of years.

Mrs. Conley stated at some point, someone made these decisions and we need to hold someone responsible.

Dr. DeGoes put money aside for repairs; no money allocated; Oldham will be the same; just a different address.

Mr. Warr asked questions about how many buses will be used for Oldham; will kids who are now at Waddington be given the option to go to Meadowcrest. He said the numbers of students for Oldham has been reduced for years.

Mr. Linneman, Transportation Supervisor, explained there will be two buses, 72 kids each, total 180 students; will look at Meadowcrest if we have to add; four tier transportation system, no cost.

Dr. DeGoes said there will be no redistricting for September; maybe further down the road, School Committee can decide if equitable numbers; (178-200 at Oldham); Budget Commission has to approve any funds spent; people were only given one option.

New speaker- His son at Meadowcrest heard about this yesterday; heard about meeting at Riverside Middle School; this did not happen for Meadowcrest; will there be a meeting for Meadowcrest parents like the Oldham parents had; he is familiar with Waddington; he had concerns that facility is not easy for kids with disabilities to get in and out; can't drop them off as easily at Waddington; just decide on Meadowcrest with no public input; will the students be isolated; there are issues with bathrooms and flight risk.

Dr. DeGoes explained that he tried to address most concerns; he invited parents to a meeting; this idea was developed last Friday

afternoon; he tried to review those concerns of parents; program being kept together and one wing of the building be used to address those needs; it is done this way in many communities and works well.

negatives and positives; there is an opportunity for older kids to work with younger kids.

Parent said he is familiar with Bradley; looking at the big picture; kids who benefit from small quiet setting; you cannot drive in back of Waddington and would have to park down the road and walk; what will drop off be like.

Dr. DeGoes stated that if the School Committee votes to approve this recommendation, incumbent on parents and administrators at Waddington and School Committee to raise concerns; he pledged the School Department will work to make those conditions right; we may need to have police facilitator come out to review traffic patterns.

Mr. Monteiro said the overall message leaving the meeting is heavy involvement with Mr. Catelli in order for the environment to be as similar as possible with input from parents and professionals; all issues will be addressed a week before school starts so no surprises; parents do not want Meadowcrest kids put on the back burner.

Jessica Beauchaine stated that it is the responsibility of the community to go to the Budget Commission to ask for money; she went on Middle School sports cut; Oldham closing; this has been going on for last year; \$350,000 for textbooks in the budget; cannot be used for that. Her daughter has services at Meadowcrest twice per week, but she was not called about the meeting; where are services being given; she did not know about this and should she have been



called; there are probably other parents who don't know; this needs to be made public soon; applause if going to Waddington; asked if there is money left from the bond and who allowed all over spending. Discussion: Dr. DeGoes explained that the Phase II money is to be used this summer; redistribution of money to address asbestos issues ordered by Department of Health which was costly; some funds had to be reallocated.

Mr. Conley – ask Mary King and Ed Daft who are gone; they made decisions how the money would be spent.

Jessica talked about the Budget Commission transparency comes forward; what decision should be on table when spending money-trying to convince people to show up; will continue to go to meetings; Budget Commission will not do it. The School Committee needs to hear it; it is important; different faces; information not translated out; Fire doors kids cannot open. Mr. Catelli said this will be addressed.

Rebecca Warr asked if that had this been broached with the Budget Commission.

Dr. DeGoes said it will be this week; recommended to School Committee this evening and will be sent to the Budget Commission this week.

What happens if School Committee takes a vote and Budget Commission says no; then what happens

Dr. DeGoes law provides Budget Commission authority and decisions would have to be carried out.

Ms. Warr-who trumps who; legally is it required before the Budget Commission? She would like the School Committee to decide this.

**Mr. Conley – close Oldham and relocate to Meadowcrest; if the Budget Commission does not want to mandate, not what School Committee voted on; legal options.**

**Mr. Monteiro will act as School Committee representative and then react to whatever is decided; his experience is that the Budget Commission makes fiscally driven decisions; School Committee favored to take reigns on this unless they can say numbers are not fiscally responsible; School Committee will stand behind their decision.**

**Mr. Ferreira had concerns that the Budget Commission will be asking the Superintendent for more cuts to balance the budget.**

**Alicia Thibeault – has a son at Meadowcrest and was sad to see what is happening to the schools; Meadowcrest parents were informed yesterday about a vague meeting; unfair at 4PM and she could not get there; we are appeasing one group for another; stability and continuity important; nice dream on paper; there will be traffic; buses; kids with IEP's; Meadowcrest is a shining star; prepares kids; more consideration should be given to small group.**

**Dr. DeGoes – no time before yesterday to notify anyone; wanted face to face meeting for concerns to hear about the program; wants to keep students together; he understands and appreciates that.**

**Mr. Conley – son attended Meeting Street and then Waddington; he praised the Principal and staff for addressing safety issues; they went over and above to address concerns.**

**Mr. Monteiro - second option still asking Oldham to move; they had concerns about scheduling; this in no way removes the stress asked**

**of Oldham, not shift of consideration.**

**Lisa Millnet at Waddington pleased with full day K ; needs to be addressed with new plan; will it be full day at Meadowcrest.**

**Mr. Monteiro – East Providence needs full day; it would be a mistake for the educational program; if the Budget Commission says differently, they will have no say; hopes that will not happen.**

**Vote to Close Oldham Elementary School – Motion by Mr. Conley to not vote on sending students to Waddington; concern about special needs parents; he asked to defer the vote for parents to ask questions; there are parents who still do not know; he needs to know why parents were not informed and how many.**

**Mr. Monteiro – does not know details of phone calls, this is the second recommendation by DeGoes. Vote by Mr. Conley to present our decision to the Budget Commission – not ideal (phone call to be addressed) part of reason for Budget Commission is that we have failed to make decisions when we have to; solutions have been looked at – if we leave at Budget Commission discretion, might not be our decision.**

**Mr. Conley – this destroys the credibility of this body; people did not have information to address this body; he supports move of 170; not good government representation of people who attend the school.**

**Ms. Thibault – if a robo call was made to parents, room would be full of parents; they were not told what the meeting was about; this affects children, families and kids, not just about moving numbers around.**

**Mr. Ferreira- does not want programs effected – he will do whatever it**

takes; Mr. Ferreira seconded the motion of Mr. Conley to defer the recommendation based on the need for public meeting with Meadowcrest parents. Mr. Conley would support two equal size school; supports Meadowcrest; not ample time to communicate out of respect for how it impacts them.

Mr. Conley motioned to defer; Mr. Ferreira's seconded: Elizabeth Clupny, nay; Mr. Conley, aye; Mr. Ferreira, aye; Mr. Monteiro, nay; Mr. Pimental, nay. Motion failed. Vote 3-2.

Motion by Mr. Pimental to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent to close Oldham School and to relocate students to Meadowcrest and Waddington, seconded by Ms. Clupny. Roll call vote: Ms. Clupny, aye; Mr. Conley, abstained; Mr. Ferreira, abstained; Mr. Pimental, aye; Mr. Monteiro, aye. Vote 3 aye; 2 abstentions. Motion carried.

Motion by Mr. Pimental to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Ferreira. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Elizabeth Clupny, Clerk of the Committee